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ABSTRACT

The nature of some of the relationships and interactions between black youth and mental health professionals are explored by this paper. It is organized into the following four discussions: (1) a portrait of black youth, given as background information; (2) specific portions of deviance theory as it relates to black youth; (3) black youth as deviants; and (4) interactions between mental health professionals and black youth. It is concluded that black youth are in no need of any particular types of social interventions. What is at issue here is the role assigned to them by contemporary society. Inasmuch as they tend to be treated by persons who share negative attitudes about their values and life styles, this denies them access to equal justice and human dignity under the law. This problem is addressed by understanding. Understanding the social and psychological damage of negative stereotypes which black youth must contend with assures the good law enforcement professional and the effective mental health worker that their chances of success will be greatly improved when working with any population defined as deviant. (Author/AM)

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DEVIANCE THEORY, BLACK YOUTH AND MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses itself to one of the most stigmatized groups of individuals in the United States, i.e., Black youth. As a Behavior Scientist and investigator, I feel that I should indicate that the paper is written as an advocate of more enlightenment towards the problems of Black youth. My frame of reference is to view the interactions of Black youth and Mental Health professionals from the perspective of stigmatized Black youth.

This paper is organized into the following discussions: (1) a portrait of Black youth as a background information; (2) Specific portions of deviance theory as it relates to Black youth; (3) Black youth as deviants and (4) interactions between Mental Health Professionals and Black youth.

Introduction

Much of what has been written about Black youth who are the products of an urban Black ghetto family background portrays the image of half-crazed "dope fiends" who are driven to commit many types of crimes in order to be able to purchase heroin and stave off the horrors of withdrawal, is one that has developed into a fixture in American culture. In fact, at such a late date as 1972, Senator Edmund S. Muskie stated that more than half of all urban crime is heavily drug oriented.

However, the relationship between Black youth and any form of behavior is infinitely more complex than the Black youth frantically committing heinous crimes in order to support a heroin habit. It is the purpose of this paper to explore and, hopefully, elucidate upon the nature of some of the relationships and interactions involved.

Values, Norms, Acceptance

In order to convince others that one's values are worthy of being recognized as the norm, there are two mechanisms which must be activated: (1) Evidence--or what is presumed will pass as evidence--must be generated to give credence to one's assertions; and (2) the Story Line must be consistent with no dichotomies. However, since some Black youth do not share equally in society, they have limited knowledge of or interest in the values and norms important to the larger society. Thus, it is possible for the keepers of the

social order to label and stigmatize them, calling them deviants while legitimizing their denial of equal justice and treatment to this population. The attribution of labels which are negative to people with whom one does not share values, tends to be a fabrication knotted with many plots and counterplots in order to justify questionable norms enforcement agents and the techniques which they employ.

If one is expected to accept the values of the larger society, then it is fair for him to expect equal justice and treatment to be provided to him from the society within which he is expected to function. For values do exist generally regardless of any exceptions. But general values are not universal values, and failure to recognize the values of others in unthinkable. To determine the outcome of any interaction which requires norm enforcement means that decisions must be made and this is a god-like task. For in a society comprised of many value systems, facts can be distorted and used as a device with which to substantiate generalizations. For instance, that most Black youth who live in urban ghettos abuse heroin--while the truth assumed to be wrapped in this contention is neither documented nor supported with physical evidence.

The Black youth who is also a heroin addict may be an addict because of the nature of his birth and the manner in which he elects to reject the larger American and group social values. He is assigned to low status--he may be bitter, angry and hostile. As a

result (of his not being an acceptable person to the persons holding the values and norms of the larger society as the only acceptable norms and values), he develops an alternate way of living.

Consequently, he may also be a highly regarded member of the society with which he identifies. He is a member of this culture because he shares freely with its other members and they with him. He may even be recognized as a person of very high stature.

Deviance Theory and Black Youth

Ronald Taylor (1976, pp. 4-17), in an exhaustive review of the literature of the psychosocial development of Black youth, has concluded that some young Blacks may have acquired alternative social and personal psychological responses to negative labels such as deviant; as they have come to understand that they are not obliged to accept and internalize any definition of themselves which is proffered by others as a basis for adaptation to a society which sanctions them unjustly. The question then becomes one of how and to what extent does the social response to labeling become important to the fate of the so-called deviant? For instance, because one speaks of norms does not mean that one will champion them.

Norms, cannot stand alone; they are the ideal of what ought to be. The larger American society always speaks in terms of norms. America tends to legislate against anything; and then consider as solved the problems which created the need for such legislation, as soon as it becomes law. As soon as a problem such as drug addiction

has been exposed to control with a law, the larger society tends to feel that the issue is resolved. This may be viewed historically in the passing of numerous laws against the non-medical use of certain drugs and in the public sector with the enactment of various drug treatment acts.

It is obvious then, that norm enforcement is not an extensive or equal attack by society on events and occurrences which it has labeled deviant. This frequent misunderstanding as to how deviance is dealt with, does not take into consideration, the human elements involved in norm enforcement and the normalization process.

Norm enforcement always involves human values. These values affect not only those persons who are the object of enforcement, but also those persons who are intimately involved with the so-called deviant; even the public servants charged with norm enforcement are in some way affected. Putting theory into practice--as a functioning set of laws--involves human values. Consequently, were one to closely evaluate norm enforcement, his observations would be of the numerous biased decisions which are made because some norm enforcers do not share the same values as the objects of their enforcement. Therefore, norm enforcement tends to be a highly discriminatory endeavor. As a consequence, so long as one shares the same values as the public servant who is mandated to enforce norms, he is less likely to become a victim of stigma.

The Public Servant

Another way in which values become involved with norm enforcement is through the development of public servants who are in some way compensated for their public service, as in the case of persons who are in the employ of the criminal justice system and mental health agencies. It is not an easy task to be involved with norm enforcement. One must be somewhat aggressive as it sometimes tends to require violent behavior. In as much as some people have no need to be violent, the need to act in a physically aggressive manner may repulse them. But, the public servant is compensated in some manner to instill his society's values in others; additionally, he may enjoy his public service. It should be noted that a great deal of socialization is necessary before one can become a public servant who must enforce norms.

There are many public servants in American society. Welfare caseworkers must assume a large part of the responsibility of instilling the values of the larger society into the value system of those within a mini-society's population it considers to be deviants, as in the case of an uneducated Black family man who is on welfare and does not report other income.

Low status Black youth are manipulated by numerous public servants who in some way control their consumption of public services; those such as police, school officials, welfare workers, and mental health professionals. Mental health professionals in drug treatment

facilities have the authority to determine a heroin addict's eligibility to receive another addictive drug in order to remain free of heroin, etc. Even if determined as eligible for treatment, he may be sanctioned and not treated because he has not grasped the public servant's teaching of values.

There is no difficulty in conceptualizing the number of agencies and numbers of people who are in some way involved in the lives of young Black people as agents of the social order. Frequently, these public servants are given a position of power which is unique as a tool with which to enforce values on some powerless individuals. The larger society does not care which method of value transplant and norm enforcement is used, so long as they are buffered and not bothered with the gory details as to how norms are being enforced.

An example of this general point can be made using the communications media's telecasting of the horrors of the VietNam war back to America. As long as it was not brought into the livingroom, the larger society felt free to say that it or they weren't aware of any atrocities that were committed other than those supposedly of North Vietnamese creation.

It is my contention then that a society which uses such a division of labor does not wish to concern itself with the values of others. Thus, it labels the values and norms of some mini-culture's subgroups as deviant and wish them out-of-sight through their specially-trained public servants. Society is not aware of the vast amount of

power it has given to this special group of "deviants" who are public servants. This vast amount of power is always left ambiguous, as an overt statement of society's generous gift of unlimited power would perhaps raise moral issues over and above those already manifest. Added to this pessimistic contention is the moralistic judgementalism which is held throughout the larger society about the values and behavior of young Blacks.

The Powerless

A method which is frequently used to alter values and enforce norms, is to point all attacks at the most powerless opposition such as those given low status. The enforcement is then focused on those who are socially least valued to the larger society and who, too, engage in behavior they reject. With this maneuver, there is little chance of involving and perhaps losing some of its more valued deviants. For in American society, some people have value to a particular group, while to others, they have none; and also, some groups do not take to the imposition of norms easily and will resist any efforts to punish them for their resistance. On the other hand, the group to which they are of no value, will expect to have additional norms forced upon them because of their resistance. Needless to say, young Black people who become heroin addicts must suffer the consequences of being assigned a multi-faceted stereotype.

The Human Costs

The recognition and appreciation of the cost to the lives of

other human beings is what is needed by a society when developing the means to manipulate values and enforce norms. It should recognize that a human action usually involves costs, either positive or negative, to other human beings' lives. The problems society gives to the Black youth who is addicted to heroin and seeks help supports this contention. Then, too, society tends to continue its degradation and discrimination against powerless Black youth because it could care less about the human costs of less than humane treatment to these people with different value systems. Society has yet to become aware of the cost to its personal well-being also.

Black Youth As Deviants

The results of Black youth being labeled as deviants has a consequence; stigma, after which they are exposed to all of society's negativeness in the way law enforcement and mental health people interact with them. Therefore, this assignment to low status of these young people is of major importance as one attempts to resolve the problem; for the assignment of low status to these youths is the work of some of those very same social agencies who, by the nature of their professional endeavors, are charged with their protection and treatment.

While not all Black youth who are born and raised in urban ghetto areas are heroin addicts, those who are will be the center of this discussion. Thus, many urban Black youth are in some way involved with drug use; however, they are not necessarily heroin addicts and

its usage may have involved them in an interaction with many outside groups such as, the law enforcement agencies, social agencies, and educational institutions. However, many, if not all of these young people are victims of the diseases of social deprivation; but this position is not a popular one.

The young Black who becomes a heroin addict, as Taylor and others have pointed out, may be responding to an obvious caste-like marginal position within the larger American society. They may have deemed it necessary to acquire a personal reality by accepting, if not always honoring, different values. Taylor was discussing the Black youth whom society has stereotyped and provided with a negative label. A middle class white youth who is also addicted to heroin is less likely to become involved with legal authorities since he usually has the means with which to conceal his behavior. Then, too, the larger society is likely to be sympathetic towards them and treat them as someone who has come under the influence of some more deviant individual or group. Although the society does provide negative labels to these white deviants, their sanctions are not as senseless or provocative as is true with Black youth who are assigned to low status. On the other hand, the very same society may consider all Black youth who are heroin addicts as delinquents, rapists, or thieves that are worthless and not wanting to change their values and life-styles. It is quite obviously possible to find heroin addicts who are young and Black just as it is highly possible to find heroin addicts who are

young and White; however, the total problem requires systematic attention. None of us here find it to be in the best interest of anyone to have people nodding in doorways, breaking into homes, or blocking traffic on major thoroughfares because of drug use. However, the answers to these problems are usually provided using the simplest solutions; namely, "put them in jail." Given these truisms, then, one should experience no difficulty in understanding the relationship that exists between society's negative stereotypes and punitive sanctions for Black youth who are assigned to a low status in American society.

By its very nature, low status does exclude most middle and upper class white youth who are drug users or heroin addicts and who use drugs in a more private environment and can afford to support a drug habit. American socio-cultural values and legal codes are interpreted in very arbitrary ways when applied to certain subcultural groups. Thus, it is safe to say that harsh drug laws affect mainly the low status Black youth who is unfortunate enough to become involved in some way with heroin usage. There is evidence also that Black males, more than others, are treated to the full extent of the law which attempts to regulate heroin possession and sales. (Uniform Crime Reports, 1974)

The Role of the Criminal Justice System as the Typifiers of the Black Youth as Deviants

Daniel J. Freed (1969, pp. 263-284) in his excellent article discusses the role of the criminal justice system and its interaction with urban ghetto residents. Whereas his view is pessimistic, it is

presented for the purpose of discussion.

The typification process as described by Freed supposedly is one which involves a high level of realistic knowledge and the ability to accurately perceive which elements with an urban environment might prove to be hostile and threatening to survival. It is commonly assumed to have three components--Law Enforcement, the Judicial, and the Corrections Processes. They are thought to add up to a "system" of criminal justice. This system is supposedly a system that will not allow false conceptions or conceptions with little understanding to come into play.

The general underlying theme in Freed's example is the myth of its being a "system," and, instead, a conflict between certain principles of law enforcement. He suggests further that although there is within a society, the desire to have laws obeyed and enforced; historically, the desire is greater to have the peace maintained. Freed states that these two principles come into conflict because there is no unity of purpose or organized interrelationship among the component parts, and, only a process through which each accused person passes. With the basic options with regard to the administration of justice left in the hands of the individual components to develop expertise in criminal justice administration, Freed allows that the interactions which take place in cases involving those assigned low status as evidence of their expertise and of peacekeeping being more valued than providing equal justice under the law.

The conceptualization of Black youth and their life-styles, that law enforcement authorities develop is important to an understanding of their reaction in a crisis situation whereby peace has been threatened. Freed feels that because law enforcement officials see crime always in its most negative missions, that they now tend to look at those assigned low status as habitual law violators. They see, urban ghettos as so crime-infested until the main issue is not how to eliminate crime, but how to gain control over a given occurrence. Thus, Black youth who reside in urban ghettos are seen as inferior beings with no stake in society and, therefore, people who deserve no justice from the "system's" component parts. Given these coneptions or misconceptions, it is not difficult to understand the typification process as devised by law enforcement authorities in their peacekeeping role in urban Black ghettos and amongst its youth.

The police "see crime in the raw" (Freed, 1969, p. 265); they are exposed to much firsthand knowledge about the violence of lawbreakers, therefore, they may come to believe that all young Blacks are lawless and violent. Lawlessness, if seen as the normal condition of life; may force them to become less attuned to law enforcement and more amenable to peacekeeping. Whenever laws are enforced, the major consideration should be their contributions to the maintenance of order; however, if the agents of law enforcement see their task in a different light, then they can justify their attacks on the civil liberties of those assigned to a low status.

Given this understanding of Black ghettos and their residents of what is common knowledge to most people who are in some way involved with the Black culture, how should law enforcement operate? Freed thinks that it should reduce its use of criminal sanction in attempts to control human behavior and to cease to operate in a vacuum created by isolation from other programs aimed at the negative aspects of the young ghetto resident's existence.

The unique knowledge that law enforcement agents acquire involves an interaction between many elements which are a part of their value system. This knowledge then comes to be a process of typification whereby law enforcement agents can relate past occurences to present conditions well enough to predict, somewhat accurately, future patterns of behavior. With this ability, law enforcement officials can then become involved in situations that at one time may have been insoluable legal problems and still insure themselves and everyone involved against any negative consequences.

The system of criminal justice can then become a resource to law enforcement agents, a way with which to keep the peace. But, law enforcement agents tend to use punitive sanction as a peace-keeping device rather than a means of solving a specific crime. There are events whereby all parties to a group disturbance are subjected to coercion and punitive sanction. While coercion can be thought of as subconscious efforts to educate people to the force of authority, punitive sanctions are a gross miscarriage of justice.

One sees in both instances the violation of civil liberties by law enforcement agents who, too, are public servants.

But the civil liberties mean nothing, for Black youth who become heroin addicts and reside in urban ghettos are by the very nature of their being considered to be of low status. And everyone, including these young people, understands that these youths should not expect equal justice under the law from some of those agents charged with its enforcement.

While not at odds with the weight of the evidence, law enforcement agents do not look to control all Black youth with "punitive sanction." Their jobs are almost impossible as it is. While understanding that in numerous cases they have been known to use unwarranted violence and senseless incarceration, there have been occasions where they chose to be paternal and indifferent to certain categories of law-breakers. For those who neither question or challenge these public servants, there is an unspoken amnesty so long as the public servant is led to believe that his knowledge of those people is factual. This attitude, then, becomes the occasion for some arbitrary peace between law enforcement officials and some low status Blacks; however, it further errodes the individual's rights. The public servants, then, come to believe that the individual should not be given equal protection under the law, or that they are worthy of equality in the administration of justice.

The relevance of this typification process is further considered

with an analysis of the process in cases involving militant Black youth. The fact that these youths will not sit still for unwarranted beatings and illegal detainment gives support to the assumption that some Black youth do view themselves as worthy of respect and equality from the administrators of justice. A single unwarranted beating or arrest may be the catalyst to full-scale confrontation. For unlike the heroin-addicted Black, the militant population of young Blacks, both male and female alike, share virtually no compromises with criminal justice authorities, for they too, are aware of what happens to some Blacks in the criminal justice process. Thus, they do not view the Justice Administrators as objective arbitors. Some court officials are vulnerable to political pressure, and they may only receive second-hand information about a case. In such instances of limited contact, the officials of the court may have little factual knowledge with which to typify militant Black youth. As a result of this lack of factual information, they tend to revert back to standard stereotypes and this reversion handicaps them even more in administering justice. The hostilities and animosities that are common to such a situation serves as a deterrent to an effective criminal justice system; and as with the heroin addict, criminal justice administration becomes an arbitrary discriminatory endeavor, when applied to the militant Black youth who may or may not use heroin.

Interaction Between Mental Health Professionals and Black Youth

First, it is necessary to state that the writing of this discussion

has provided me with an opportunity to document personal perceptions of interactions between mental health professionals and those deemed to be low status Black youth. In noting that there are numerous agencies that treat and care for heroin addicts, most of these agencies are embossed with the flavor of punishment for those Blacks who must become involved with them for the purpose of ridding themselves of their heroin addiction. Again, the Black heroin addict has never had systematic help from many of these mental health agencies and their professionals. Thus, as one attempts to conceptualize and to theorize concerning interactions between mental health professionals and young Blacks, he finds it to be an extremely difficult task because it has occurred most frequently as a punitive device. The youth who is both Black and addicted to heroin is perhaps the most extreme personification of American social values in that he directly receives all of American society's negative attitudes and behaviors via the negative treatment he receives.

Attitudes and Treatment

Most mental health professionals who are charged with the treatment of heroin addicts too often come into the therapy with attitudes towards Blacks and heroin addicts that are the learned behavior of their earlier socialization. These are the traditional attitudes towards Blacks and heroin addicts; they reflect punitive moralistic sentiments which are the very base of Western culture. Only of recent vintage is the thought that addicts who are Black deserve treatment

instead of sanction for their problem. Traditional positions state that most young urban Blacks are dope fiends who are lazy and dangerous, and that punishment with legal sanctions is the only solution to the problem.

Additionally, these culturally-biased attitudes towards Black heroin addicts are the definers of what services the addicts will be provided by the community; at the individual level, they are the attitudes which will allow no rapport to be established in a therapeutic alliance.

A completed study (Penick and Stewart, 1974) of Black community attitudes and knowledge of substance use and their impact upon treatment for Black heroin addicts and alcoholics in our community supports this position. The study surveyed 89 mental health workers and a stratified, random sample of 25 professional workers were interviewed. The results indicated that even Black mental health professionals are moralistic and punitive regarding the Black heroin addicts, presenting special problems in treatment and the professional's unwillingness to accept them as clients. It is interesting to note here, that of 6 Black ministers interviewed, none admitted to knowing any alcoholics or drug addicts.

Several obvious reasons for this resistance to treating Black heroin addicts are often engendered by the fact that the larger community cares little as to how they are treated--methadone maintenance instead of long-term psychotherapy and beliefs that Blacks cannot

fulfill the intellectual requirements needed in order to respond positively to psychotherapy. Concurrently, many mental health professionals are afraid of physical aggression from Black addicts. Needless to say, these attitudes invariably come to be a part of the treatment and a negative implication in therapist-patient alliances.

The problems of Black addicts are further intensified by an overt lack of tolerance on the part of many professionals. One of the most commonly held notions among many white mental health persons who are in some way involved with Black youth is that when addicted to heroin, Blacks are violent and dangerous; to them there is the image of dope-crazed Blacks who, under the influence of heroin, become physically aggressive; and the other side of the coin has lazy Black youths who only desire to satisfy needs that are immediate. One only needs to look at the arrest records of these youths to substantiate these contentions. The report of (The President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice, 1967) gives some additional evidence too, that mental health professionals discriminate against Black youth; their findings were that numerous government-supported mental health facilities excluded heroin addicts--especially Blacks. This finding would seem to indicate the extent to which Black youth who are unfortunate enough to be in need of professional help for a problem of heroin addiction will find very little tolerance from within the ranks of those supposedly highly-qualified

professionals who are mandated to treat all problems of addiction.

Conclusion

Black youth are in no need of any particular types of social interventions. What is at issue here is the role assigned to them by contemporary society. Inasmuch as they tend to be treated by persons who share negative attitudes about their values and life-styles, denies them access to equal justice and human dignity under the law. Therefore, they are right in defining values for themselves. People who are forced to steal are constantly confronted with tensions and pressures which cannot be resolved if institutions and their agent are biased in their interpretation of the values which they possess. One must be treated with dignity if he is to accept mainstream social values and norms.

Mental health professionals, in reality, cure no one. What cures is understanding; understanding the social and psychological damage of negative stereotypes which Black youth must contend with, assures the good law enforcement professional and the effective mental health worker that his chances of success will be greatly improved when working with any population it defines as deviant. For as Grier and Cobbs (1969, p. 154) have so eloquently stated:

> Fundamentally one wonders why there should be anything singular about a Negro's mental troubles. We would like to answer that right away. There is nothing reported in the literature or in the experience of any clinician

known to the authors that suggests that black people function differently psychologically from anyone else. Black men's mental functioning is governed by the same rules as that of any other group of men. Psychological principles understood first in the study of white men are true no matter what the man's color.

Notes

The material in the section "Deviance Theory and Black Youth" was conceptualized and adapted from Taylor, R. L. (1976) "Psychosocial Development Among Black Children and Youth: Traditional Views Reconsidered," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry 46(1) pp. 8-16. "The Role of the Criminal Justice System as the Typifiers of Black Youth as Deviants" is based on Daniel J. Freed's paper (1969) "The Nonsystem of Criminal Justice: Law and Order Reconsidered," 19: 263-284. The research upon which this paper is based was supported (in part) by NIDA Grant 5-H80DA01356 from the National Institute of Drug Abuse, National Institute of Health.

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